DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 167 277 PS 010 432

AUTHOR Rauth, Marilyn
TITLE A Long Road to an Unresolved Problem: Comprehensive Child Care in the U.S.
INSTITUTION American Federation of Teachers, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE [75]
NOTE 12p.; Photographs will not reproduce well
AVAILABLE FROM American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, 11 Dupont Circle, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036 (Item No. 630; single copy, free; additional copies, $0.25 each)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Day Care Services; *Early Childhood Education; *Educational Policy; *Political Issues; Public School Systems; School Involvement; *School Role
IDENTIFIERS *American Federation Of Teachers

ABSTRACT

This booklet reviews the history, current conditions, and future prospects of child care programs in America. Insitutionalization of children, placement in foster homes and nurseries, the professionalization of day nurseries, federal monetary assistance to nursery schools, increases in the number of working mothers, and recent proposals for comprehensive care are briefly recounted. The controversy over public vs. private control of early childhood education is discussed. The position of the American Federation of Teachers is advocated. It is concluded that only if the government is willing to make a major change in social policy will it be possible to avoid having inadequate and limited child care develop into a problem of catastrophic proportions. A major recommendation is that public schools act as coordinators for all children's services. (Author/RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED167277

A LONG ROAD TO AN UNRESOLVED PROBLEM

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

American Federation of Teachers

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

PS010432

COMPREHENSIVE CHILD CARE IN THE U.S.

A REVIEW OF THE HISTORY, CURRENT CONDITIONS, AND FUTURE PROSPECTS OF CHILD-CARE PROGRAMS IN AMERICA.

By MARILYN RAUTH

☐ Problem, crisis, or resolution? Some say in the United States we face a problem only when it becomes a crisis, and while we argue over which solution is best, the crisis worsens, positions harden, and solution becomes impossible. Although the trend in our approach to child care appears to follow this route, it is hoped we will not see this prediction through to its ultimate outcome.

The federal government's unwillingness to provide services for the young children of this country is well documented. Despite the fact that recent years have seen record numbers of women entering the work force, its most recent comprehensive survey of child-care needs is based on 11-year-old data published in 1968.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that nearly 28 million children under 18 years of age had mothers who worked or were looking for work at the end of March, 1975. More than 6.5 million of these children were under age six. Obviously many of them are in need of care or supervision.

A study conducted by the National Council of Jewish Women reveals that care is needed by an additional 2.5 million children whose mothers are not in the work force.

Yet the Child Welfare League of America estimates that there are, at most, 4.3 million spaces available in child-care facilities. Many of these are unlicensed, and most—some 77 percent of them—are of such inferior quality that they should not be used.

The Child Welfare League, a national voluntary accrediting organization for child-welfare agencies in the U.S., and other sources have cited these shocking alternatives to adequate care:

- **at least 10,000 children under six left alone during the day with no care or supervision while parents work;**
- **over 500,000 cared for by a sibling under 16;**
- **and 1.2 million at home with a parent too handicapped or sick to provide proper supervision.**

There is ample research which underscores the importance of early learning experiences to optimal development of children. Yet a 1973 Census Bureau report reveals that only about 34 percent of four-year-olds and 14 percent of three-year-olds are enrolled in preschool programs, and of those, 70 percent attend nonpublic programs. In the majority of child-care arrangements, little progress has been made beyond the custodial care of the 1800s.

The most prevalent type of child care is in-home care with the "caregiver" (perhaps "caretaker" would be a better word) being a relative, friend, neighbor, or hired babysitter. Space and equipment are often limited, as are opportunities for social interaction. The next most popular facility is the family day-care home. It is widely estimated that more than half of all children taken out of the home for full-day care are in family day-care homes which serve five or six children. Smaller percentages of children are cared for in group day-care homes (extended or modified family residences which, if licensed, serve up to 12 children), day-care centers (serving 12 children or more), nursery schools, parent cooperatives, and the like.

Only about five percent of all family day-care homes are licensed. While most day-care centers are licensed, such licensing may mean little because of inadequate enforcement of regulations due to lack of staffing and/or negligence on the part of inspection agencies. Requirements, often minimal to begin with, do little more than set standards for scaled-down sanitation facilities, lighting, fireproofing, and so on (see box).

LOOKING BACKWARD

A growing need for day nurseries first became evident just before the turn of this century. Rapid industrialization had lured thousands of uprooted rural families and even greater numbers of foreign immigrants into industrial urban areas. As the promise of affluence soon fell before the harsh reality of city life, it often became apparent that one breadwinner could not support the family's needs. Consequently, many mothers were forced to seek work, requiring long hours away from their children. A dilemma arose, for the mother who worked was considered derelict because she was not at home caring for her children; yet without the additional income, she could not feed or clothe them. The problem was compounded for the many immigrant families who bore the burden of both survival and acculturation.

Working mothers, particularly those who wer widowed or abandoned, were often forced to place their children in orphanages. As cautions increased that "the institutional child is not a normal child," alternatives were sought. Many children were placed in foster homes or sent to the country to live with farm families in an effort to provide family life, but none of these solutions proved practical on a large scale. Thus, day nurseries, based on the French model which attempted to simulate a loving home environment, came into being, as a reaction against the over-institutionalization of children. Funded principally by private philanthropy, they enjoyed great popularity from the 1870s to World War I. But history shows there was a shortage of concerned people, of money, and of knowledge about how to meet the needs of young children.

In her book, "Who's Minding the Children? The History and Politics of Day Care in America," Margaret O'Brien Steinfels reports:

The nurseries, usually converted houses or brownstones, were open six days a week, 12 hours a day. A great age span could be found in most nurseries: infants and children from the age of 2 weeks to 6 years—the addition of after-school programs brought that range to the elderly level of 8 and 9. Some day nurse-

Marilyn Rauth is assistant director of the AFT's educational-research department. She formerly was a classroom teacher in the Neshaminy school district in Pennsylvania.

photographed by Susanne Anderson

ries provided emergency night care when a mother was ill; others allowed a child to be dropped off for a few hours; some hired a visiting nurse to assist mothers when children were ill; others held classes for mothers in sewing, cooking, English, and child care.

Despite their ideals and good intentions, these nurseries fell far short of standards we would expect today. Their benefactors and personnel lacked the knowledge of how to transform good intentions into effective child-development programs. Overcrowding was commonplace; the quality of food extremely poor; and most of the personnel were untrained.

The criticisms of day nurseries in those days (some of which still are heard today) included: fears of weakening family ties; undermining the father's sense of responsibility for being the sole breadwinner; encouraging mothers to work, perhaps to provide only luxuries, thus causing them to neglect child-rearing responsibilities; and depressing male wages.

To counter these charges, philanthropists within the day-nursery movement reavowed their commitment to strengthen the family. Theirs was a charitable service to be used only on a temporary basis until the mother's "problem" could be remedied. They argued that not only could the mother learn how to discipline and care for her child from the nursery's example, but, additionally, the child might be prevented from becoming a future welfare problem. It was their contention that as social and economic conditions improved, day nurseries would cease to exist, and mothers and children would return to their "rightful" place in the home.

Even at that time, the National Federation of Day Nurseries and many local associations recognized the variant causes of need for day nursery services and proposed they would not soon be alleviated. Theirs was a more practical view based upon the realities of single-parent homes, unemployment, poverty, and women's participation in the labor force.

Eventually, day-nursery federations and associations at the local and national levels began to promote upgraded standards in health, nutrition, record-keeping, adult/child ratios, and, to some extent, education. Compliance was voluntary and, in many cases, ignored. A degree of progress was made when, by the end of World War I, California had passed a state law governing day nurseries, and several cities had regulatory city ordinances.

PROFESSIONALIZATION OF DAY NURSERIES

The professionalization of day-nursery personnel occurred during the 20-year period following World War I. This resulted in major changes in entry age, program, and purpose. The practice of placing infants in day nurseries from the time they were several weeks old, where they were bottle-fed instead of at mother's breast, was challenged, and eventually the minimum entry age became three. Though some today regret the exclusion of infants, it should be remembered that the day-care associations of the time recommended an adult/child ratio of 1:8 for infants. In actual practice, the ratio was often much higher. Standard-setting organizations, such as the Child Welfare League, now recommend an adult/child ratio of 1:2 for infants, indicating that challenges to the day nurseries' infant care were quite justified. A second major change was replacement of nursery attendants with professional nursery-school teachers who changed education from secondary to primary importance.

The focus of day nurseries was further altered after 1919 by the new involvement of trained social workers. Formerly a service to working mothers, day nurseries now became a form of social welfare. Admissions were thoroughly screened and were allowed only in cases of "social maladjustment" or "serious familial problems." Thus day care became further stigmatized. Steinfels points out that "poverty in the minds of the first day-nursery workers . . . was perceived to be the result of conditions external to the family—but having a strong effect on the family." The new view of "maladjustment" suggested "conditions internal to the family."

As a result of new quota restrictions in immigration and creation of widows' pensions in many states, large segments of the day nurseries' clientele were reduced. Ironically, passage of the 19th Amendment undercut the militant feminism movement and brought a renewed emphasis on the mother's responsibility in the home. Finally, economic expansion and the pursuant rise in the standard of living for some distracted attention from the plight of the poor. Though the need continued, day nurseries dwindled to those which provided only minimal custodial care. Privately run nursery schools catered to a limited number of middle- and upper-class children whose parents could afford such a program.

FEDERAL FUNDS FOR NURSERY SCHOOLS

Following the near demise of day nurseries, interest in child care continued alternately to wax and wane. The first public money for child-care programs was allocated in 1933 through the Federal Emergency Relief Administration and the Works Project Administration (WPA). Both were based primarily on an effort to create jobs, but to say there was no concern for the needs of children or working mothers would be to ignore a social awareness which did, in fact, exist at that time. Federal and state funds for child care during this period also were granted to alleviate the physical and mental handicaps imposed on young children because of economic and social difficulties of that period. All personnel—teachers, nurses, nutritionists, cooks, clerical workers, and janitors—were hired from relief rolls because of the government's concern with widespread unemployment. By 1937, some 40,000 children were served in 1,900 nurseries established within public schools. Pamela Roby in "Child Care—Who Cares?" cites a reference to the fact that those programs are "still considered by professionals to have provided excellent health and nutritional care as well as education."

Many of these nurseries ceased to exist as WPA programs were phased out. However, the day-care movement was soon revived when, during World War II, more and more women joined the labor force. In August, 1942, it was decided that the Lanham Act, authorizing the federal government to pay for half of the public-works programs in war-impacted areas, could be applied to day

care. By the end of the war, almost $52 million had been spent by the federal government for 3,102 day-care centers serving 600,000 children. States contributed $26 million in matching funds.

The Federal Works Administration, authorized to administer the Lanham Act, channeled funds through state education departments. Most of these programs were placed in local school systems because of their existing facilities and trained child-oriented staff. However, because the federal government had not set any standards for these programs, quality varied from one locale to another.

After the war, most public funds for day care were shut off as, once again, it became the prevailing view that the mother belonged in the home (this attitude also made it easier for returning veterans to reassume their place in the labor force). Women using day care were again seen as neglectful mothers. This belief was reinforced by research in the 1940s describing damage done to institutionalized orphans and by John Bowlby's study in 1951 on maternal deprivation. Bowlby found that the institutionalized child's permanent separation from the mother resulted in abnormal development. Throughout the 1950s this was often cited as an argument against placing children in day-care settings. However, later research by Bloom, White, Caldwell, Mead, and others was to show that temporary separation under the proper conditions actually could be beneficial to the child.

The wars in Korea and Vietnam opened new employment opportunities for women. The "New Frontier" of the Kennedy era and the "Great Society" and "War Against Poverty" programs of the Johnson Administration (including the famous Head Start) brought heightened expectations in living standards, and more and more wives and mothers sought employment to supplement family incomes. The growth of inflation during the last several years has continued this trend. From 1950 to 1973, the number of working mothers doubled—from 22 to 44 percent. Approximately one-third of all preschool children now have mothers who are working or looking for work.

This rapid influx of women into the labor force was naturally accompanied by increasing demands for day care, as

reflected in the legislation of the 1960s. At this point, the emphasis was primarily on needs of working mothers rather than on child development.

Child-welfare services, including day care, had been meagerly funded through the Social Security Act since 1935. Amendments to this Act in the late 1960s provided the first significant funds for day care, e.g. in Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) legislation, since passage of the Lanham Act during World War II; but the Revenue Sharing Act of 1971 placed limits on funding. There are now at least 60 different federally funded programs for child care and child development. The Senate Finance Committee reports that the federal government presently spends at least $1.3 billion in direct funds on child care.

COMPREHENSIVE CARE?

Since the late 1960s, there has been a great flurry of legislative activity focusing on the child-care needs of this country. Much of this evolved out of former President Nixon's introduction of the Family Assistance Plan as part of a social-security and welfare-reform bill. Speaking to Congress in 1969, Nixon declared: "So crucial is the matter of early growth that we must make a national commitment to providing all American children an opportunity for healthful and stimulating development during the first years of life." The Administration's bill, in contrast to the rhetoric, was limited to day-care for children of welfare recipients who would agree to accept work, training, or vocational rehabilitation. Comprehensive developmental care was not required, and family payments were based on ability to pay.

In the first eight months of the 92nd Congress (1970-71), 10 proposals related to child-care programs were introduced. Sen. Russell Long (D-La.), for example, proposed a Federal Child Care Corporation supported by a $500-million Treasury loan to provide child care, first, for preschool and school-age children of welfare recipients who needed such services to work or to take employment training, and, secondly, for children of low-income working mothers not eligible for welfare. Federal funds would have covered all costs of child care for welfare mothers and subsidized the cost of services for other eligible working mothers.

It was, however, the Comprehensive Child Development Act of 1971 which ultimately garnered the largest Congressional and public support, finally passing as part of the Economic Opportunity Act on Dec. 6, 1971. This legislation would have created a nationally coordinated network of child-development programs for all children under 15, with priority given to those who were of preschool age or economically disadvantaged. Parental participation was assured through representation on elected councils and a wide range of services was to be offered—educational, nutritional, social, medical, dental, and psychological. Though many organizations, including the AFL-CIO, lobbied for this bill, former President Nixon vetoed the EOA on Dec. 9, 1971, alleging that, among other objections, the Act

THE KINDERGARTEN MOVEMENT

An example of the flexibility of public education in the U.S. is the kindergarten movement, which evolved separately from day nurseries. First established in this country in 1856 by German immigrants, early kindergartens were devoted primarily to the education of young German-speaking children. Philanthropist Elizabeth Peabody founded the first kindergarten for English-speaking children in Boston in 1860 to serve as a school for socialization of wealthy children. Her idea was replicated, providing the impetus for growth of a kindergarten movement. In 1873, the first kindergarten was established in a public school in St. Louis, Mo.

With massive immigration from Europe to this country in the 1880s, the focus of kindergarten was changed from the affluent to the poor. Many citizens saw this socialization process as a public responsibility and during the 1890s many kindergartens were incorporated into public schools. Today, while kindergarten attendance is not compulsory, 75 percent of all five-year olds attend and more than four-fifths are in the public schools.

"would commit the vast moral authority of the national government to the side of communal approaches to child-rearing against the family-centered approach."

The attempt to override this veto was thwarted, ushering the first comprehensive child-development act to pass Congress into the vast archives of legislative limbo. Sen. Walter Mondale (D-Minn.) and Rep. John Brademas (D-Ind.), chief sponsors of the Child Development Act, continued to submit child-care legislation to Congress in the following years, as did other Congressional leaders. Meanwhile, organizations which had worked diligently for passage of this legislation from 1969 to 1971 kept trying to build and strengthen their alliances to secure enactment of a comprehensive child-development bill.

By 1974, the prevailing social and political scenes appeared ripe for a second serious attempt at procuring comprehensive developmental programs and day-care services for all children of this nation, and the Child and Family Services Act of 1974 was introduced in both houses of Congress.

By this time, an impressive body of research existed, demonstrating the crucial nature of children's early years, from birth to age eight, in relation to their intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development. Burton White and others had shown that even as early as 10 months, a child's learning patterns are developing, and they therefore believed that child services could appropriately begin at the infant stage. Benjamin Bloom, in his well-known study, "Stability and Change in Human Characteristics," emphasized "the great importance of the first few years of school as well as the preschool period of the development of learning patterns and general achievement. These are the years in which general learning patterns develop most rapidly, and failure to develop appropriate achievement and learning in these years is likely to lead to continued failure throughout the remainder of the individual's school career."

In "Nursery Education: The Influence of Social Programming on Early Development," Martin Deutsch concluded from his research that higher group-intelligence-test scores were found among children who had preschool and kindergarten experience as compared to those whose initial contact with school was in first grade. Piaget explained further that "intelligence emerges as it is nurtured, it grows as the child has things to act upon," and J. McVicker Hunt wrote, "It now looks as though early experience may be even more important for the perceptual, cognitive, and intellectual functions than it is for the emotional and tempermental functions." Studies by Chittendon, Keister, Rice, Hood, and others found preschool programs to have a very positive effect on children's socialization skills and personality development. The research of Katrina De Hirsch and her associates demonstrated that many "intelligent but educationally disabled children . . . would not have required help had their difficulties been recognized at early ages. Early identification would have obviated the need for later remedial measures."

These and many other studies point to the fact that child development is a complex, continuous process enhanced by an environment conducive to learning and by skilled teachers who are knowledgeable about the child's intellectual, physical, social, and emotional growth.

Further agitation for child-care legislation was spawned by the problematic plight of poor and middle-class working parents.

In response to these needs, the Child and Family Services Act of 1975, as now written, would establish an Office of Child and Family Services to oversee child-development, day-care, and family-services programs. Rather than being based on the child population in each state, the Senate bill's allocation formula continues the mixed formula approach: based on the number of economically disadvantaged children, the number of children under six, and the number of working mothers and single parents. Prime sponsors must establish Child and Family Service Policy Committees, one-half must be parents and one-third must be poor. The Secretary of HEW is authorized to develop new child-care standards based on the 1968 Federal Interagency Day Care Standards.

Many organizations differ in their outlook on these and other details of the bill, but prime sponsorship—the ques-

tion of who shall manage funds and determine the nature of services to be offered and which agencies can best provide them—has become by far the most controversial aspect of this legislation. Presently designated in the bill as prime sponsors are states, localities, combinations of localities, or public and nonprofit organizations.

CONTROVERSY

The American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, under the leadership of its president, Albert Shanker, is spearheading a drive to have public-school systems designated as presumed prime sponsors, allowing other public nonprofit organizations to assume this responsibility if a school system is unable or unwilling to accept it. Existing public nonprofit day-care operations which meet required standards might also be funded.

Shanker cites many reasons for AFT's position, among them the following:

1. Schools exist in every community throughout this country—urban, rural, small town, suburban—and therefore have the capacity to meet the goal of **universally accessible** early childhood education and day care for all on a voluntary basis.

2. The former shortage of school personnel and space no longer exists. Many unemployed early childhood teachers and paraprofessionals are available; many other unemployed teachers with suitable qualifications, as well as those in other occupations, might be retrained; and a portion of the vacant classrooms, already publicly owned, could be utilized for day care and early childhood programs, thereby decreasing some new construction and rental fees.

3. Schools have an established procedure for assuring that standards be met in terms of program, personnel qualifications, staffing ratios, and health and safety requirements. Enforcement efforts outside the public schools would require a large, new bureaucracy which would mean an unnecessary expenditure of millions of dollars of public monies and an extension of many years before an effective administrative procedure could be established.

4. A recent OCD study is typical of many reports showing that the lack of continuity between early childhood programs and primary grades causes preschool gains to diminish by the age of seven, eight, or nine. If there are innumerable sponsoring agencies, coordination between these two levels would be impossible.

5. Schools could quite logically become coordinators of screening procedures, in cooperation with public-health and social-services agencies. After needs are diagnosed through screening, the school system with parents' consent would provide services available and refer children whose needs it could not meet to other community agencies. Follow-through and maintenance of complete records would be important services within this program.

6. Placement of comprehensive child care in the public schools would necessarily increase parental involvement and contact, thus enhancing the school's position as a community center.

Opposition to presumed prime sponsorship by public schools, however, has arisen in several quarters. The National Association for Child Development and Education, representing the private for-profit day-care interests, is lobbying against the exclusion of proprietary day-care centers from authorization for prime sponsorship. It argues that many centers already exist and that to deny them federal funds would be an insult to private enterprise, upon which our economy is based. The problem with proprietary centers grows out of their need to remain competitive with other forms of child care and still make a profit. In the absence of exorbitant fees, profit must come from adhering to a bottom line in one or a number of several categories: personnel, facilities, equipment, materials, food, and inservice training.

By far the majority of child-care advocates opposes their inclusion because of repeated studies showing the custodial nature of most operations and their failure to meet quality standards. The 1972 survey by the National Council of Jewish Women, for example, found that of 431 proprietary centers visited throughout the country, 49.5 percent were rated "poor," 14.5 percent rated "good," and only 1 percent "superior." Under the proposed legislation, prime sponsors may contract with proprietary centers for programs and services, a questionable arrangement.

Theodore Taylor of the Day Care and Child Development Council of America (DCCDCA) believes schools should not be presumed prime sponsors for two reasons: first, "even those teachers who would find day care a satisfying field in which to work . . . would have initial difficulties with adjusting themselves to an educational approach which is largely nonverbal," and second, that parents who seek day care "want, need, and deserve a closer connection with providers of day care than what the school systems feel is necessary or de-

A CRISIS STAGE

The United States is the only industrialized country in the world which does not provide basic child-care services for its citizenry. Our chaotic condition of demand far exceeding supply, and the absence or erosion of standards is further evidence of the lack of national commitment to providing services for children.

Traditionally child care in the U.S. has been available to the wealthy or, through private philanthropy or federal assistance, to the very poor. But the middle class, unable to pay for more than custodial child care or to qualify for assistance, has been left to contend with this dilemma on its own. As a result of government inaction, the U.S. has reached a crisis stage in terms of need for child care. The debate continues in Congress as to whether the federal government should fund comprehensive child-care programs, and if so, what the best delivery system should be.

AFT has been the vanguard in support of public-school prime sponsorship of comprehensive child-care programs. Many national organizations, including the AFL-CIO and a number of its affiliated international unions; educational organizations such as school administrators, school boards, PTA, and the National Education Association, have joined the AFT in endorsing the public schools as the most responsible means of delivering services to children.

sirable with the public schools."

Many educators retort that language development is an essential element in early childhood education programs and that school certification requirements would assure the use of only those teachers who are trained in all aspects of child development. They refute Taylor's second stated reason by pointing out that schools, being dependent for funds on voted bond issues or voted increases in property-tax millage, are responsive to the public's wishes and that responsibility for child development within the schools can only increase the desired parental involvement. It is likely that DCCDCA's position is influenced by the fact that proprietary centers constitute a sizeable proportion of its membership.

Of immediate concern to all in the labor movement were previous union efforts to establish child-care programs as a regular service to their members or as a benefit won through collective bargaining. Several unions such as the Communications Workers of America, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, and others, developed and implemented day-care centers in several large cities. In 1968, the United Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 2, negotiated early childhood preschool programs in its contract with the New York City board of education. (These preschool centers have since been closed due to lack of funds.)

After much discussion, however, it became apparent that in the interest of making these programs available to **all** children for whom they were desired, public schools represented the only institution capable of providing the universal accessibility desired.

It was discovered that child care at the work site holds a number of problems, regardless of the sponsor:

• If a business or factory closes, the child-care center closes with it.

• If an employee is laid off or fired, child-care services are no longer available.

• It is more likely that a parent who is sick would take a child to a neighborhood school than to the work site; or that someone else in the neighborhood could perfrom this service.

• The working parent may not have sufficient time to investigate various child-care facilities in the area. The public schools, therefore, could better protect their interest.

On Oct. 7, 1975, the AFL-CIO convention adopted a resolution calling for a massive federal commitment for providing early childhood development and day-care services to all children who need them (see story, American Teacher, this issue).

POOR STANDARDS, LITTLE ENFORCEMENT

The federal government has set a poor example in licensing, and establishing and enforcing standards in child care. A report compiled for the U.S. Senate Committee on Finance states that although the Federal Interagency Day-Care Requirements technically regulate nearly all child care provided under federal funds, "it is generally recognized that they are rarely monitored."

Licensing normally is contingent on meeting standards for health regulations and building and fire codes. Many states and localities are under pressure from proprietary day-care operators and others to relax even these minimal standards.

A report by the Auerbach Corporation in 1970 on the Federal Work Incentive Program found that the major problem cited by day-care operators "is in meeting the various local ordinances which, according to some staffs, are prohibitive. Some examples are: windows no more than 'x' feet from the floor; sanitation facilities appropriately scaled for children; sprinkler systems; fireproof construction; etc."

Another study, "Day Care Centers—The Case for Prompt Expansion," which examined the inability of New York City to meet the demand for day care, stated that insistence on strict adherence to the city's health code "severely handicaps the efforts of groups attempting to form centers in the substandard areas." The implication is that substandard child care is permissible in poverty areas.

Licensing laws rarely set standards for programming and curriculum; renewals are usually granted without an evaluation of program results and often without further inspection of the physical facilities. Some set minimum personnel qualifications, but the requirements are generally below those for administrators, teachers, health and social workers, and counselors working in all other levels of education. For example, many states require only that preschool "teachers" have a high-school education or its equivalent or make the vague stipulation that they be "equipped for work required."

THE FUTURE

Only if the government is willing to make a major change in social policy will we avoid having inadequate and limited child care develop to a problem of catastrophic proportions. Yet we face a familiar political problem. Both the legislative and executive branches of the federal government hold out little hope for enactment of a comprehensive child-services act in the near future. They are content to ignore the desperate needs of individual citizens. They use the disagreement among various child-advocacy organizations over the best means of providing child care as a pretense to shirk their responsibility for assertive action. It is just this inertia, however, which has subjected the government to growing attacks. Our crisis in child care can no longer wait on the halting machinations of Congress.

The termination of overlapping, obscure, and diffuse programs is long overdue. Congress must be persuaded to take decisive action. And as in the one-time fight for public education, organized labor and its allies are leading the way in showing that only through the presumed prime sponsorship of public schools will it be possible to effectively coordinate quality child-development services for all children.

Public schools, under such a provision, would ultimately become a total community resource, seeing that the public's needs were met in regard to children's physical and emotional welfare, early childhood education, and extended day care.

Responsible critics have mistakenly overlooked an accessible compromise on prime sponsorship of children's ser-

vices. Advocates of public-school sponsorship share many of their concerns and would be more than willing to join them in efforts to assure that legislation includes provisions for high standards, comprehensive services, and parental involvement.

With this type of unity, Congress could ill afford its complacency on child care. The result would be a universally accessible child-services system and even greater parental involvement in the public schools.

The alternatives portend further ineffective use of public monies. Right now, the federal government, through the Office of Child Development, has funded a project to promote greater coordination of child-development and education services between preschool programs outside the schools and the primary grades. This expenditure could be more efficiently made if preschool programs were coordinated through the public schools. Once most parties are willing to discuss continuity and when there is an effective way to begin bringing such continuity about, it will no longer seem an impossible feat. It is possible, for example, for New York City schools to coordinate their curricula, methodology, and classroom management with independent, nonprofit groups which meet standards throughout the city. It is true enough to say this would require a substantial amount of time and effort. It is a necessary venture.

While continuing diversity through various day-care programs, the public schools, as presumed prime sponsors, could act as coordinators for all children's services, similar to the function of "direction centers" often used in special education. After needs are diagnosed through screening, the school system with parents' consent would provide services available and refer children whose needs it could not meet to other community agencies. This practice would lessen overlap of services and call attention to needs which are not being met.

Health services should include both preventive and remedial care. Among these services would be complete medical and dental examinations; immunization programs; speech, hearing, and vision tests; and assessment and treatment of any developmental, psychological, or physical disorders. Screening, diagnosis, and treatment should begin as early as possible since deficiencies in these areas are increasingly difficult to correct with each passing year of life.

Structure and content of early childhood programs must be based on goals determined by needs of individual children and their families in any given locale. Early childhood education should, however, encompass all aspects of child development—intellectual, social, emotional, and physical. For this reason, teacher training is essential, and preservice programs which do not address themselves to all of these criteria should be revised.

Although it would be inappropriate to endorse any one curriculum approach, certain elements are basic in any design. Play has been found to be an essential component of early childhood programs, valuable in development of socializing skills, motor coordination and concept development. The young child should be offered many opportunities for decision-making and problem-solving. Conceptual foundations should be laid in academic content areas with children free to progress at their own rate. As levels of maturity, which affect learning readiness, differ even among children of the same age, individualization is essential to a successful program.

The school environment, therefore, must offer a wide assortment of experiences suited to many developmental levels. Adult-child ratios required for such individualization are those recommended in the Federal Interagency Day Care Requirements:

1:10—Children six and over
1:7—five-year-olds
1:5—three and four-year-olds

When and if infant care is provided, organizations like the American Federation of Teachers, the Child Welfare League of America, and others recommend an adult-child ratio of 1:2.

Flexibility emerges as the key word in early childhood education. Public schools are well-equipped to administer alternative preschool and day-care programs based on goals and priorities established by parents. Accommodations can be made for variances in program approaches and philosophies; in length of programs—half-day, full-day, or 24-hour day-care services; and in program sites—in-home, school, family day-care homes, day-care centers, and so forth.

Greatest caution must be given to maintenance of standards in staffing ratios, health and safety, program and personnel quality, and facilities and equipment. The public-school system represents the only institution with broad enforcement experience and capabilities. To ignore this fact would result in a poorly managed child-care program, the ramifications of which could be far worse than no program at all. □□□

REFERENCES

"Child Care Data and Materials," Committee on Finance, U.S. Senate, October, 1974.

"Early Childhood Education and Child Care Program," statement by AFL-CIO executive council, May 6, 1975.

"Federal Day Care Legislation," Inequality in Education, No. 12, July, 1972, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Center for Law and Education.

Fein, Greta C. and Alison Clarke-Stewart, "Day Care in Context," New York, N.Y.: John Wiley and Sons, 1973.

"Guidelines for Early Childhood Education," Maryland State Department of Education, Baltimore, 1972.

Mindess, Mary, and Alice V. Keliher, "Review of Research Related to the Advantages of Kindergarten," Washington, D.C.: Association for Childhood Education International.

O'Grady, Jane, "Child Care: A Growing Problem," AFL-CIO American Federationist, August, 1972.

Roby, Pamela, Ed., "Child Care—Who Cares?" New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, Inc., 1973.

Steinfels, Margaret O'Brien, "Who's Minding the Children? The History and Politics of Day Care in America," New York, N.Y.: Simon and Schuster, 1973.

"The Care and Education of Young Children," Massachusetts Early Education Project. Washington, D.C.: Day Care and Child Development Council of America, Inc., 1972.

"Toward Comprehensive Child Care," Day Care Consultation Service, Bank Street College of Education. Washington, D.C.: Day Care and Child Development Council of America, Inc., 1974.